



UNDERSTANDING THE IDEA AND FAPE IN RELATION TO FUNCTIONAL SKILLS

A Guide for Teachers and Child Study Team Members

INTRODUCTION

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the federal law that ensures students with disabilities have access to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) that meets their individual needs. 20 U.S.C. § 1400 et seq. Under the IDEA, students with disabilities are entitled to receive services that allow them to access the general education curriculum and participate in educational activities to the maximum extent appropriate. 20 U.S.C. § 1400(c). This includes addressing functional skills that are necessary for the student's independence and inclusion in various settings. N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.7(c)(2).

While the IDEA doesn't explicitly outline detailed regulations for each functional skill, it establishes the framework through which Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are developed. IEPs are legal documents that outline the educational plan and services for each student with a disability. 20 U.S.C. § 1414(d). These plans are developed collaboratively by the IEP team, which includes parents, educators, and relevant specialists. 20 U.S.C. § 1414(d)(1)(B). Functional skills, such as toileting, dressing, eating, and behavior management, are addressed within the context of the IEP. N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.7(c)(2).

This guidance document aims to highlight how the IDEA and FAPE intersect with the development of IEPs specifically in relation to functional skills like toileting, diapering, dressing, feeding, and more. As educators and child study team members, it's crucial to understand how these regulations impact the inclusion and progress of students with disabilities.

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Considerations for IEP Development



Assessment: Thoroughly assess a student's functional skills to identify areas of strength and areas needing improvement.



Functional Goals: Craft measurable and achievable functional goals that align with the student's present levels of performance and long-term objectives.



Supports and Services: Determine the necessary supports, accommodations, and related services that will facilitate the student's progress in functional skills.



Progress Monitoring: Regularly monitor the student's progress toward their functional goals, adjusting strategies as needed.

IDEA and Its Relevance:

IDEA ensures that students with disabilities have access to FAPE that meets their unique needs. In the context of functional skills, IDEA emphasizes the importance of addressing a student's individualized needs comprehensively, including both academic and functional aspects. The development of functional skills is critical for a student's independence, socialization, and overall well-being.

FAPE and Functional Skills

FAPE guarantees that students with disabilities receive educational services that are tailored to their individual needs. When it comes to functional skills, FAPE extends beyond traditional academic learning. It includes assessing, addressing, and supporting a student's ability to perform daily activities that promote self-sufficiency. Functional skills directly contribute to a student's ability to access and participate in the educational environment.

Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and Functional Skills:

IEPs are the cornerstone of special education services. For students requiring support in functional skills, IEPs play a pivotal role in designing interventions and accommodations. IEP teams, which often include teachers, child study team members, parents, and other specialists, collaborate to create tailored goals and strategies that address the student's unique needs. Functional skills should be integrated into the IEP, considering the student's present levels of performance and aiming to enhance their independence and participation.

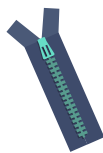


IEP TEAM RESPONSIBILITIES



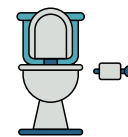
FEEDING

- Assess the student's feeding abilities, preferences, and any dietary restrictions.
- Collaborate with a school nurse, speech therapist, and other relevant specialists to address feeding challenges.
- Develop feeding goals that focus on improving self-feeding, swallowing, and dietary expansion.
- Consider modifications to the eating environment and mealtime routines to support the student's needs.



DRESSING

- Evaluate the student's motor skills, fine motor coordination, and any physical limitations related to dressing.
- Collaborate with occupational therapists to determine strategies for independent dressing.
- Create dressing goals that aim to enhance the student's ability to put on and take off clothing, fasten buttons, and manage zippers.
- Identify adaptive clothing or assistive devices that may be beneficial.



TOILETING

- Conduct a comprehensive assessment of the student's toileting skills, including the ability to recognize cues and maintain hygiene.
- Coordinate with physical therapists and occupational therapists to address mobility and fine motor challenges related to toileting.
- Develop toileting goals that target independent use of the restroom, including undressing, using toilet paper, flushing, and handwashing.
- Establish a consistent toileting schedule and communication system between home and school.



BEHAVIOR

- Conduct a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) to understand the triggers and functions of challenging behaviors.
- Collaborate with behavior specialists, psychologists, and counselors to design Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs).
- Set behavior goals that focus on teaching alternative behaviors, self-regulation, and social-emotional skills.
- Implement positive behavior supports and strategies within the classroom and other settings.



COMMUNICATION

- Evaluate the student's communication abilities, including expressive and receptive communication skills.
- Involve speech-language pathologists and communication experts in designing communication goals.
- Develop goals to enhance the student's ability to express needs, preferences, and emotions through verbal and nonverbal means.
- Implement augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems when appropriate.



MOBILITY AND TRANSPORTATION

- Assess the student's mobility needs, including walking, using mobility aids, and navigating different environments.
- Collaborate with physical therapists and mobility specialists to address mobility challenges.
- Set goals that target safe and independent mobility, including transitions between activities and navigating the school environment.
- Determine the need for assistive devices, such as wheelchairs, walkers, or other mobility aids.